Operation Iraqi Freedom

Reunion Briefing

Purpose

To prepare soldiers and families for the exciting and difficult process of reunion

Reunion

A time of readjustment after separation; the process of making life “normal” again

The Goal

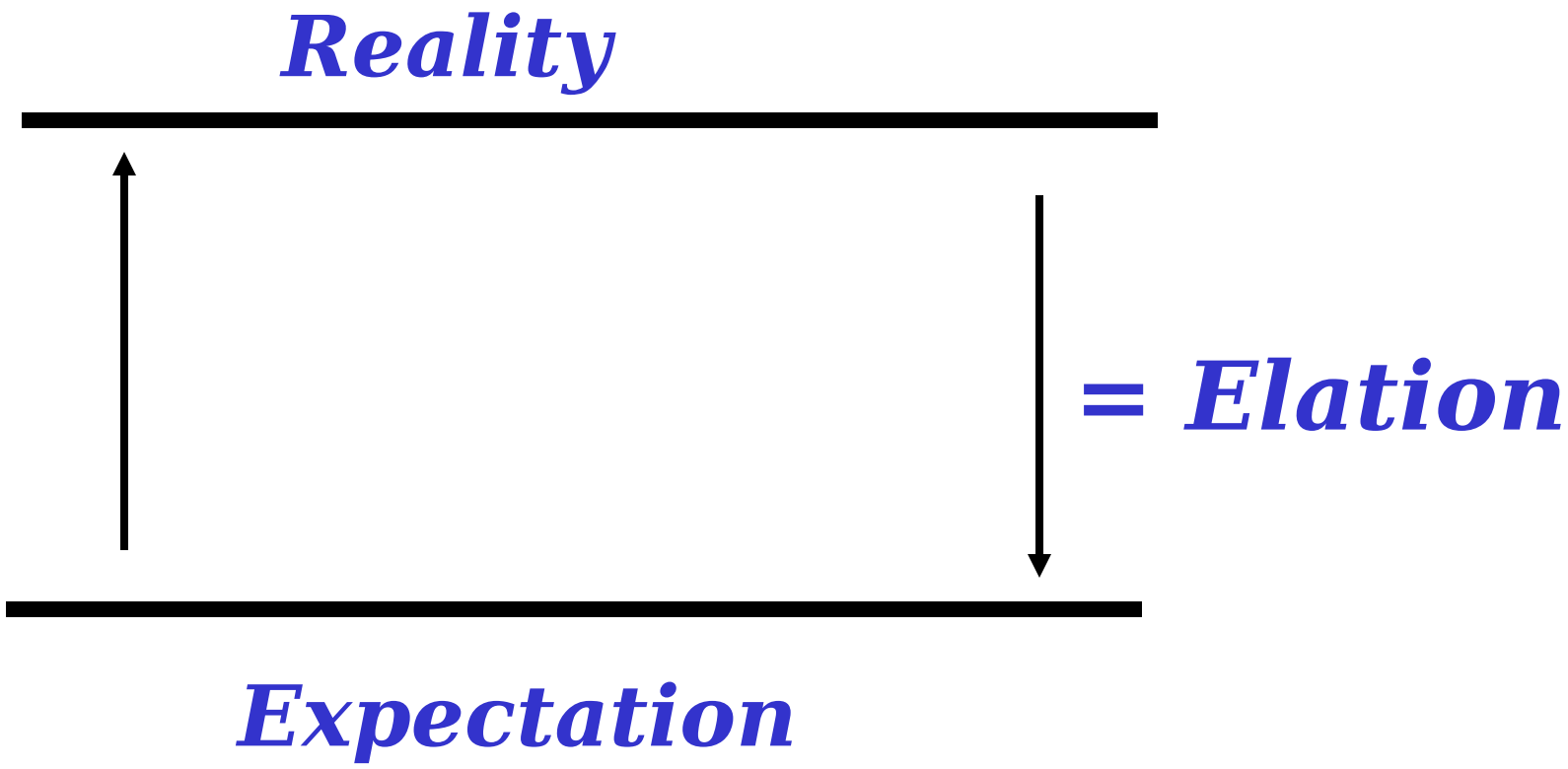
The goal is that every reunion would be a “gentle merger” and not a “head-on collision”

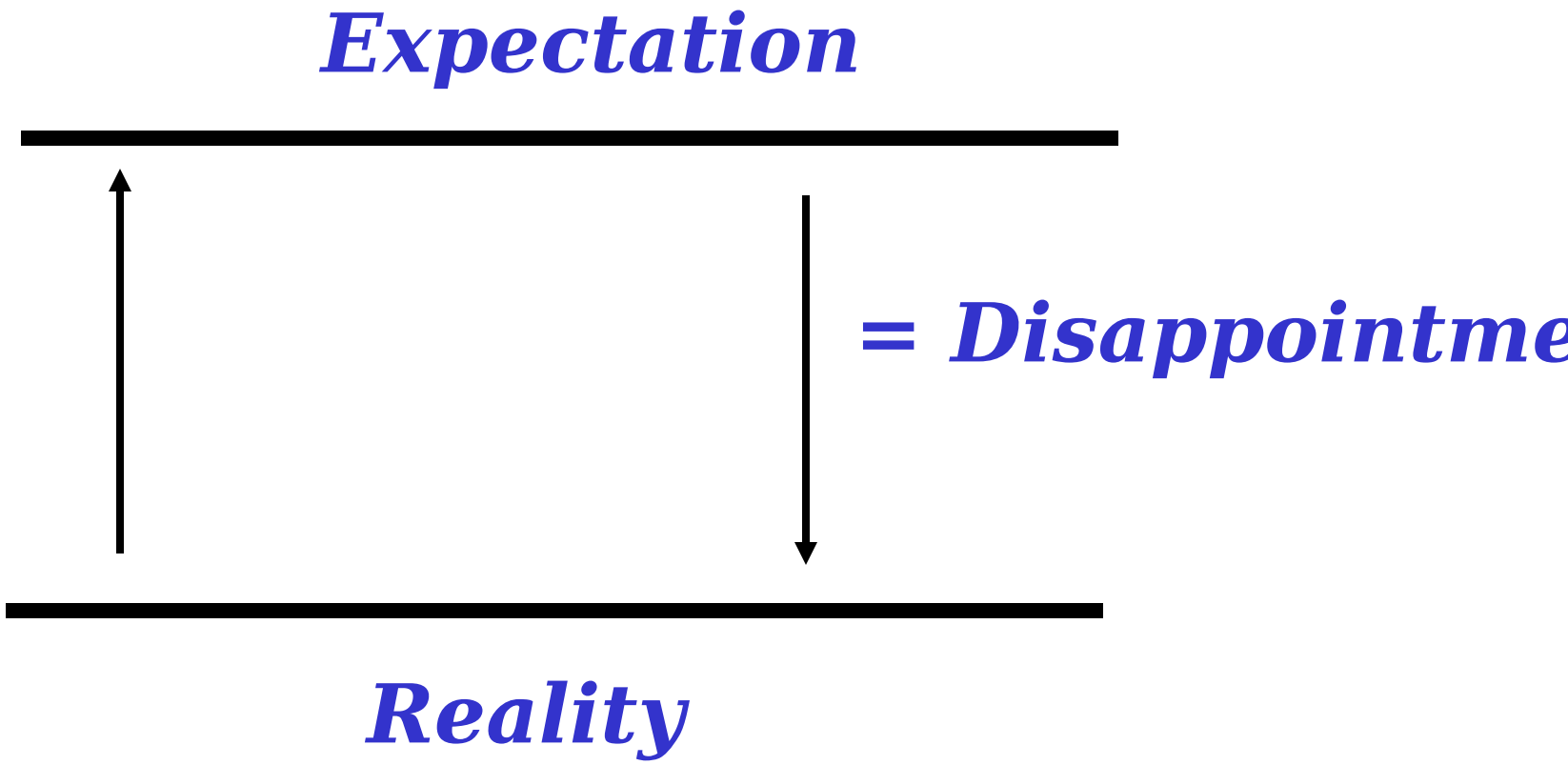
Agenda

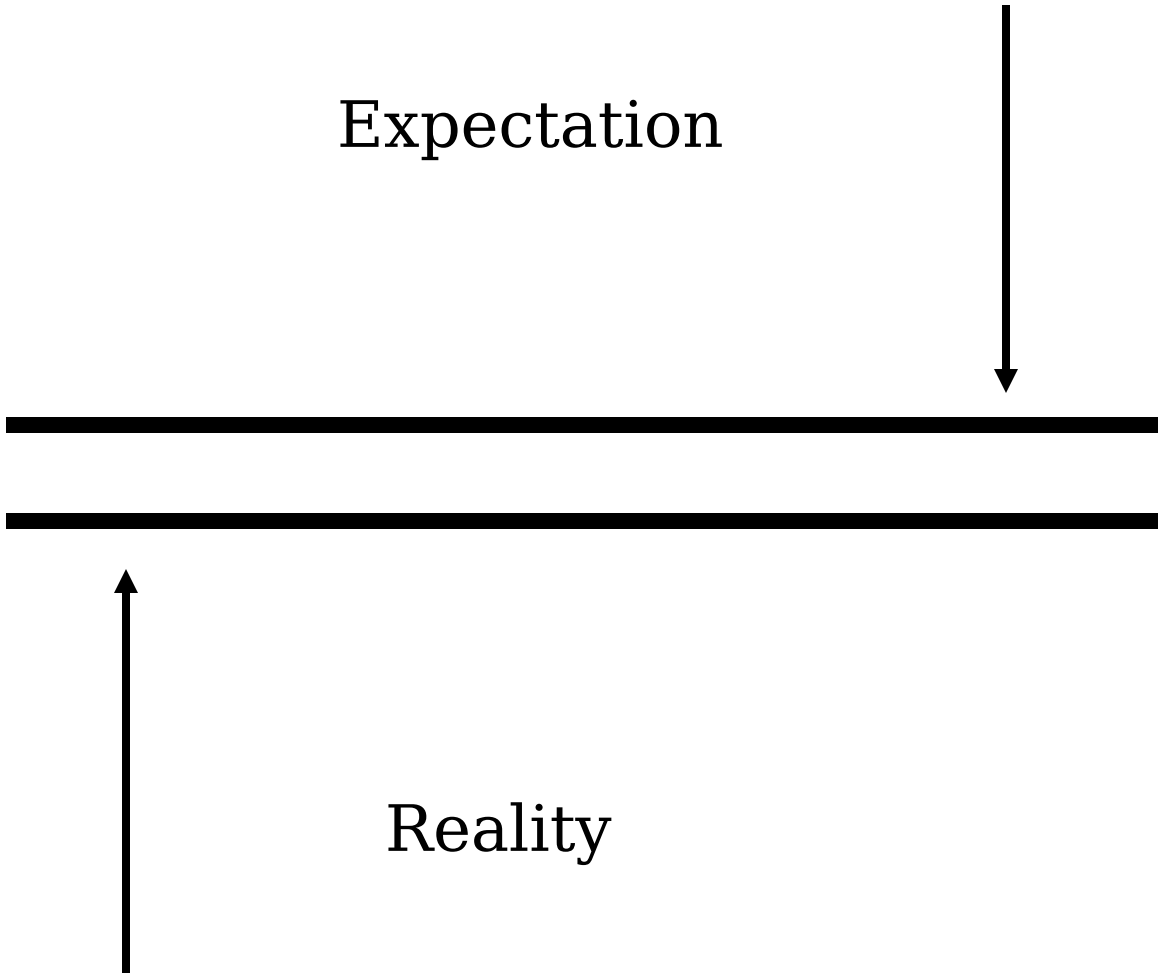
- Introduction
- Post-deployment Realities & Emotions
- Reunion with your Children
- Reunion with your Spouse
- Reunion Stress & Flashbacks
- How to Cope
- Conclusion

Post-Deployment Realities

- Reunion can be as challenging as deployment
- Ordinary person who has experienced extraordinary events
- Everyone has changed
- Communication may be difficult at first
- Roles have changed
- Interests may have changed
- Old problems haven’t disappeared


Reality
= Elation
Expectation


Expectation
= Disappointme
Reality


Expectation
Reality

Post-Deployment Emotions

Children's Emotions (Age):

- May not know you when held (<1)
- Hide or slow to approach (1-3)
- Guilt or scared about your absence (3-5)
- Demand time and attention (6-12)
- Moody or act disinterested (>13)
- Divided loyalties and fear (All ages)?

Suggestions for a Successful Reunion with your Children

- Communicate (talk & listen) about your separation experiences
- Make it a family reunion – don’t leave the children out
- Spend special one-on-one time with each child
- Don’t force the reunion
- Comfort, hug, and reassure constantly
- Love is spelled T-I-M-E!

Post-Deployment Emotions

Soldier's Emotions:

- Will my family still need me?
- Will my kids recognize me?
- How did things go while I was gone?
- Will everyone be happy to see me?

Post-Deployment Emotions

Spouse's Emotions:

- How much has my spouse changed?
- Have I made good financial decisions?
- Did I do okay with the kids?
- Does he feel the same about me?

Handle Change With Tolerance and Flexibility

Steer Clear of Immediately Making Urgent Pressurized Decisions if Possible

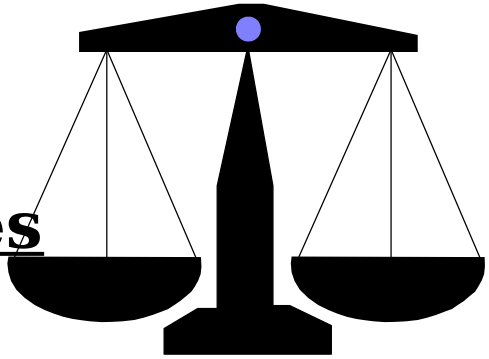
Be Sensitive To Changes In Your Loved Ones

Men
ON
OFF
Women
ON
OFF

Reestablishing Intimacy

Balancing Intimacy and Sex

- **Differences in Male and Female Sexuality**
  - **male focus sexual act**
  - **female focus “relational”**
- **Make Intimacy Your Goal**
- **Temporary Performance Difficulties**
- **May Be Emotionally or Physically Awkward**
- **Honeymoon Will Wear Off**
- **High Expectation Can Lead to Tremendous Disappointments**



Expect Some Depression After Honey-moon phase

Homecoming Letdown

- **Unrealistic Expectation**
- **Pre-Deployment Problems Remain**
- **Depression**
  - **Two weeks or longer is serious**
  - **Aware of suicidal risk**
  - **Seek counseling, see chaplain**
- **Drug or Alcohol Abuse**
- **Domestic Violence**
- **Anxiety or Panic; Nightmares**

Flashbacks

- Flashbacks are episodes of re-experiencing the events that occurred during a deployment
- During a flashback episode, soldiers feel as if they are “back in the Gulf” and are may not be aware of their immediate surroundings
- Although disconcerting and uncomfortable, flashbacks are generally normal and not associated with a more serious problem *UNLESS* they persist for several months or cause significant interference in a soldier’s ability to function normally

Flashbacks (2)

- Flashbacks may occur in response to a “trigger” (e.g., a loud noise that sounds like a weapons discharge) or spontaneously without a “trigger”
- Soldiers can cope with flashbacks by reminding themselves that flashbacks are to be expected
- Soldiers can cope with flashbacks by discussing them with family, friends, supervisors
- Soldiers can cope with flashbacks by seeking professional assistance if they are concerned about these experiences

Possible Additional Reactions

- Difficulty talking about deployment experiences
- Difficulty readjusting to family routines
- Difficulty reconnecting with children and spouse
- Discomfort being around other people

Positive (+) Coping Mechanisms

- Take time to Rest and Relax
- Spend time with family and friends (when ready)
- Get together with buddies to discuss deployment
- Resume a hobby that was not available during the deployment
- Working around the house
- Take leave
- Reconnect with friends and family who live elsewhere

Negative (-) Coping Mechanisms

- Drinking alcohol excessively
- Taking illegal drugs
- Going on a spending spree
- Gambling
- Picking fights
- Driving recklessly
- Excessive risk taking behaviors
- Isolating oneself for long periods

When Normal Reactions Become Problematic

- Functional impairment: anything that significantly interferes with a soldier's ability to do the things that he or she needs to do in any important area of life (work, home, family, social, spiritual)
- Constant oversleeping is a common reaction to deployment that can become a functional impairment
- Functional impairment is the clearest sign that a normal reaction to deployment may be turning into a more serious problem

When Normal Reactions Become Problematic (Cont)

- If normal reactions persist longer than 6 – 8 weeks ***AND*** continue to cause the soldier distress, it may be a sign that normal reactions to deployment may be turning into a more serious problem
- However, there is **no set time line** for normal reactions to resolve; in some soldiers 6 – 8 weeks is sufficient, others may need more or less time

Referral Sources for More Serious Issues

- Chain of command
- Chaplain
- Unit or hospital behavioral health officer
- Unit sick call
- Army OneSource

Tips for Returning Soldiers

- **Make homecoming a special event….but**
  - **Don’t pack six month of fun into one weekend**
  - **Too many activities increases stress level**
- **Express gratitude to significant others**
- **Don’t Play Monday Morning Quarterback**

Tips For The Returning Soldier (con't)

- **Give family time to having you around again**
- **Go slowly on disciplinary issues**
- **Save knock-down drag-out issues for later**
- **No problems are too big to solve….**

  -only people too small to solve them

Tips for Spouse

- **Allow the soldier to have his space**
  - **May not be used to all the activity at home**
  - **Not used to children**
- **Don’t press for decisions**
- **Be patient**
  - **Remember he has been used to functioning in a military environment not a family environment**
  - **Allow him to “find his place” in the family**

Keep Channels of Communication Opened

Remember Reunion Is A Process Not An Event

QUESTIONS !!!